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ARE THE REASONS FOR IT AS SIMPLE AS RONALD REAGAN AND CLAIRE STERLING WOULD HAVE US BELIEVE?

BY BLAINE HARDEN

During the past decade—while the United States has felt guilty about Vietnam, shied away from sending troops into Angola, refused to protect a dictatorial regime in Nicaragua and generally tried to be moral and decent in its foreign policy—what have those sneaky Russians been up to?

The short answer, given by a growing number of conservative foreign policy thinkers with influence in the Reagan administration, is that the Soviets have been up to no good. The argument goes like this:

While soft-minded liberals in Washington and the capitals of Western Europe were seeking friendship and trade with the Soviet Union, the Soviets conspired throughout the 1970s with terrorists of every stripe to disrupt and disturb the governments of Great Britain, Spain, West Germany, Italy, Turkey, Japan and selected countries in Latin America and Africa. Examples abound.

✓ The beloved English war hero, Earl Mountbatten of Burma, was murdered in 1979 on his fishing boat by a Provisional IRA terrorist who learned his bomb-making craft in Libya under Soviet supervision.

✓ Aldo Moro, the Italian Christian Democrat statesman, was kidnapped and killed in 1978 by terrorists of the Red Brigades, the radical left underground organization

whose leaders trained in Soviet KGB camps in Czechoslovakia and Soviet-supported terrorist camps in South Yemen.

✓ The legendary terrorist "Carlos the Jackal," who helped organize the massacre of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympics in Munich and in

1975 led a kidnapping squad that seized 11 Arab oil ministers in Vienna, learned how to ply his bloody trade in three special training camps in the U.S.S.R.

There you have it: a conspiracy. Carlos the cold-eyed killer drinks vodka with the KGB. The Provisional IRA slaugh-

ters helpless school girls with Soviet-made Kalashnikov assault rifles. The violence-crazed Baader-Meinhof Gang blows up West German banks for the furtherance of Soviet world domination. The conspiracy theory of terrorism, with the Russians as the bad guys, has an intoxicating politi-

cal appeal in this city where Ronald Reagan reigns. Reagan himself claims the Soviets reserve the right "to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat" to further their goal of world domination.

Secretary of State Alexander Haig, the soldier turned diplomat, accuses the Soviets

of "training, funding and equipping" the forces of worldwide terrorism. The blue-eyed former general has his own personal reasons for

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newly powerful Republican hard-liners that Democrats who used to run U.S. foreign policy (and who now stand accused of ignoring Soviet involvement in terrorism) question whether the "Russians did it" theory is based on genuine intelligence information or on anti-Communist conservatism that's welded to a keen sense of what the electorate wants to hear.

"I have a feeling there is a lot of loose-talk going around with very little support," says former United Nations Ambassador Donald F. McHenry. "It has the pungent smell of politics."

Whatever its motivation, the Reagan administration's finger-pointing has provoked the Soviet Union into one of its more hyperbolic, self-righteous rejoinders since the Cold War. Soviet Defense Minister Dmitri Ustinov said last month the U.S. accusations were an "evil-minded deception" to cover up Western subversion in Poland and other Communist countries. "Ter-